

Latest downtown plan shows Aurora 'on the brink' of breakthrough

 chicagotribune.com/suburbs/aurora-beacon-news/news/ct-abn-aurora-downtown-st-0625-20170623-story.html

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6/23/2017

Hundreds who came to an open house to see a draft of the updated Aurora downtown plan might have had a sense of déjà vu.

First, there have been plenty of downtown plans since the 1960s – some of them implemented in part, some still sitting on shelves collecting dust.

Second, this plan – an actual update of the Seize the Future Plan from 2005 – is already being implemented in spots. In fact, the most common statement from people looking at details of the plan recently was, "they're already doing that."

All of which is fine, said Stephane Phifer, Aurora's planning and zoning director, and the city's point person with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, which gave technical expertise to the plan update. CMAP awarded Aurora a technical service grant for the project.

Some implementation goes back to the original plan in 2005, and the years along the way. Some goes back to October 2015, when this most recent plan update began.

"Anything we've been able to implement along the way, we are," Phifer said. "We've been working on this since October 2015, so we hit the ground running."

Lindsey Bayley, a CMAP senior planner, said as planners were writing text for the update, they commonly found themselves writing, "continue to do x, y and z."

"The city would have a good idea, and just run with it," she said.

One example is traffic flow – a tenant of the plan is to improve traffic flow through the downtown, and while that remains a key goal, the city already has done much with that by changing one-way streets to two ways, and putting in different signalization.

Mayor Richard Irvin called the plan "a central phase in our downtown development." He said, thanks to what has already been done, Aurora's downtown is "contemporary, but holds historic appeal."

"I firmly believe downtown Aurora is on the brink of a tremendous breakthrough," he said.

Both Irvin and Phifer pointed out that this plan update has had more public input than any other. The update kicked off with a visioning session 1 1/2 years ago that packed a community room at the downtown Waubesa Community College campus.

The input still can continue through email. People can see the plan update at <http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/programs-and-resources/ita/aurora>, and can still send comments by email to Lindsey Bayley, at lbayley@cmap.illinois.

There will be a public hearing on the plan likely sometime in August, Phifer said, and officials hope to have the update before the City Council in September.

Irvin called on Aurorans to help make "this vision a reality." And he pointed out that it would get consistent updates in the future.

Officials pointed out that one reason for updating an existing plan is to have something current to give prospective developers who want to come to downtown.

"They ask, where's your plan, and we can say, here," said Bill Wiet, Aurora's chief development officer.

There likely are still skeptics who point to all the plans of the past, and their limited or lack of success. For them, Norm Titiner, a retired businessman who owned a store downtown for years, and was part of pushing and boosting downtown plans since the 1960s, had a comment.

"This is the best review of downtown I've ever seen," he said.

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